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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet presents quotes of Native American elders concerning Native philosophy and way of life. This advice is intended to transmit Native American thoughts on how to live a good life and to address the essence of a natural education. Originally prepared for Native American young people, this pamphlet is now being offered to all people, especially those who have become disconnected from their mother cultures. The quotes reveal the importance of teaching children about themselves, about moral values, about respecting nature, and about the role of spirituality. (LP)

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# A NATURAL EDUCATION

## NATIVE AMERICAN IDEAS AND THOUGHTS

Compiled and Illustrated
by Stan Padilla

RC019375

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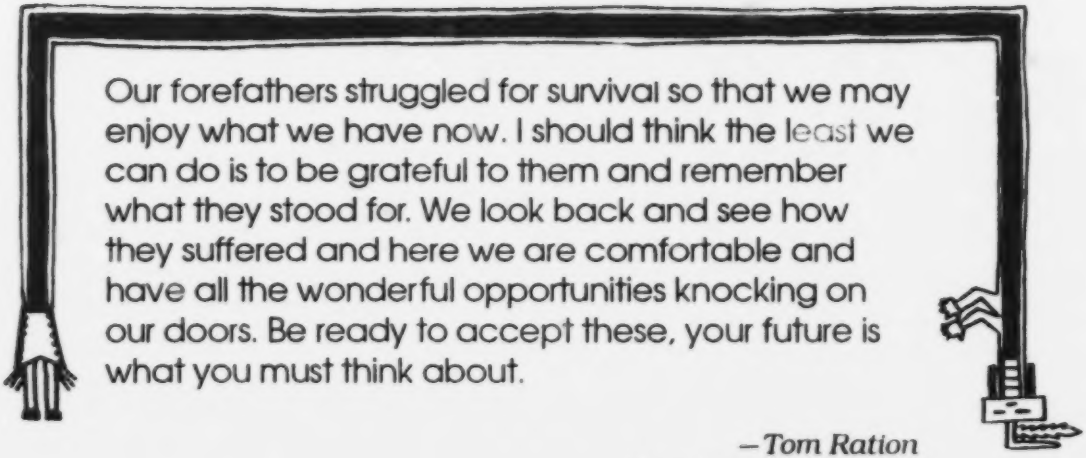


Our forefathers struggled for survival so that we may enjoy what we have now. I should think the least we can do is to be grateful to them and remember what they stood for. We look back and see how they suffered and here we are comfortable and have all the wonderful opportunities knocking on our doors. Be ready to accept these, your future is what you must think about.

*—Tom Ration*
***Navajo Medicine Man***

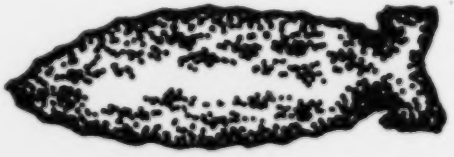
## INTRODUCTION

Since earliest times there has been an aura of mystery surrounding Native American culture. Knowledge has been handed down from one generation to another through oral traditions; father to son, mother to daughter. While the ancient wisdom was encoded in legend, song and symbols, the greatest body of Native history, philosophy and life ways was preserved in the minds and hearts of the elders. Great care was taken by them to cultivate the memory of the past, to nurture and teach it in the present to prepare for the future generations.

With the coming of the Europeans to America, Native American life ways were altered in a profound way. Education, as we know it today, was introduced and the systematic destruction of the traditional methods for the transmission of knowledge was begun. Today these old ways continue to be woven with a small thread as compared to the past, but *they are still living!*

For this book, I have gathered advice from the elders on "how to live a good life on this earth" and to address the essence of a natural education. Education and Knowledge not born out of intellect, but out of heart, soul and wisdom! Originally this book was prepared for Native American young people, but it became apparent that it could also be meaningful for many people, especially those who have become disconnected from their mother cultures. Please accept this book as a gift from the elders whose voices speak in the wind. Try as best as you can to carry these words in a sacred manner for that is their original intention.

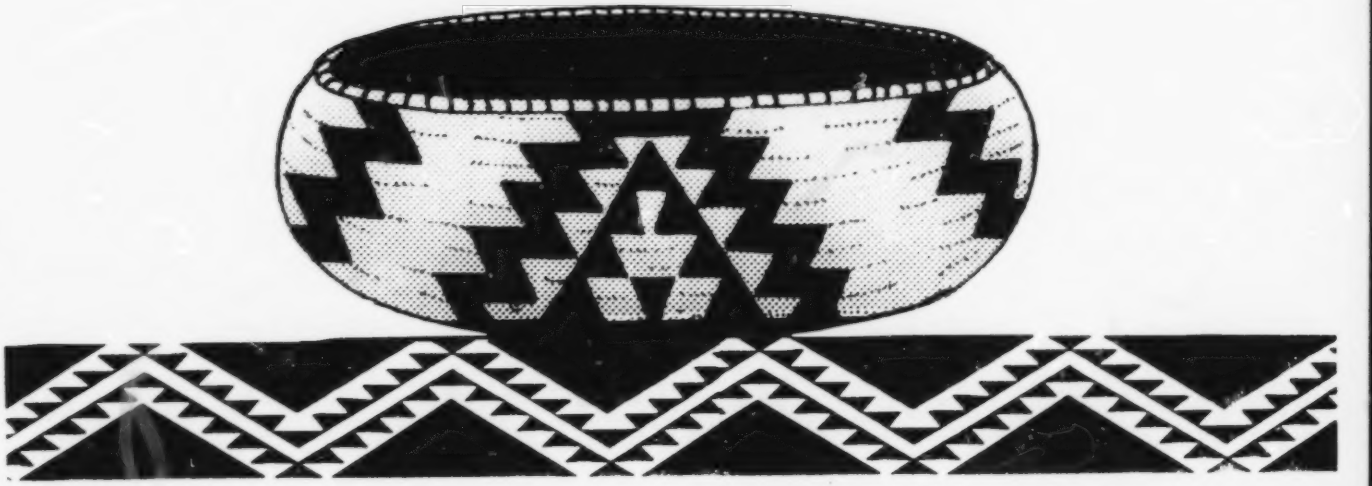
—Stan Padilla



Knowledge
is like
the wind...

once obtaining it,
you can go
anywhere.

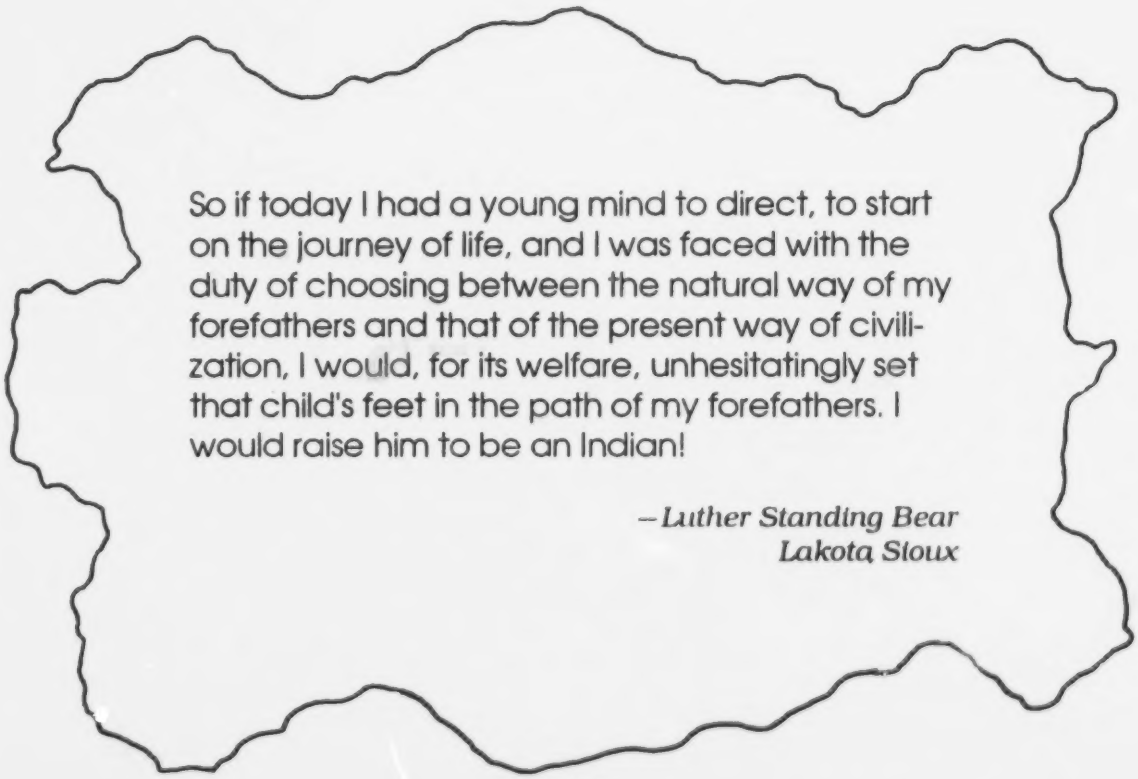
*—Yellow Horse*



Always do what you can. Learn all that's in you, and bring it out for the people to see, expecially the children so they won't give up along the way. When our heavenly Father created us, He gave us our minds too, not just our bodies. He gave us a great gift when He gave us our minds. Because our minds come from his, it's special; it's sacred. Our minds are sacred and we have a duty to it. Never forget this. Always do your best because we can. Our teacher is the first teacher and the leader of all teachers. So, don't say you can't. Don't hide your talents. Bring them out of your minds for everybody to see.

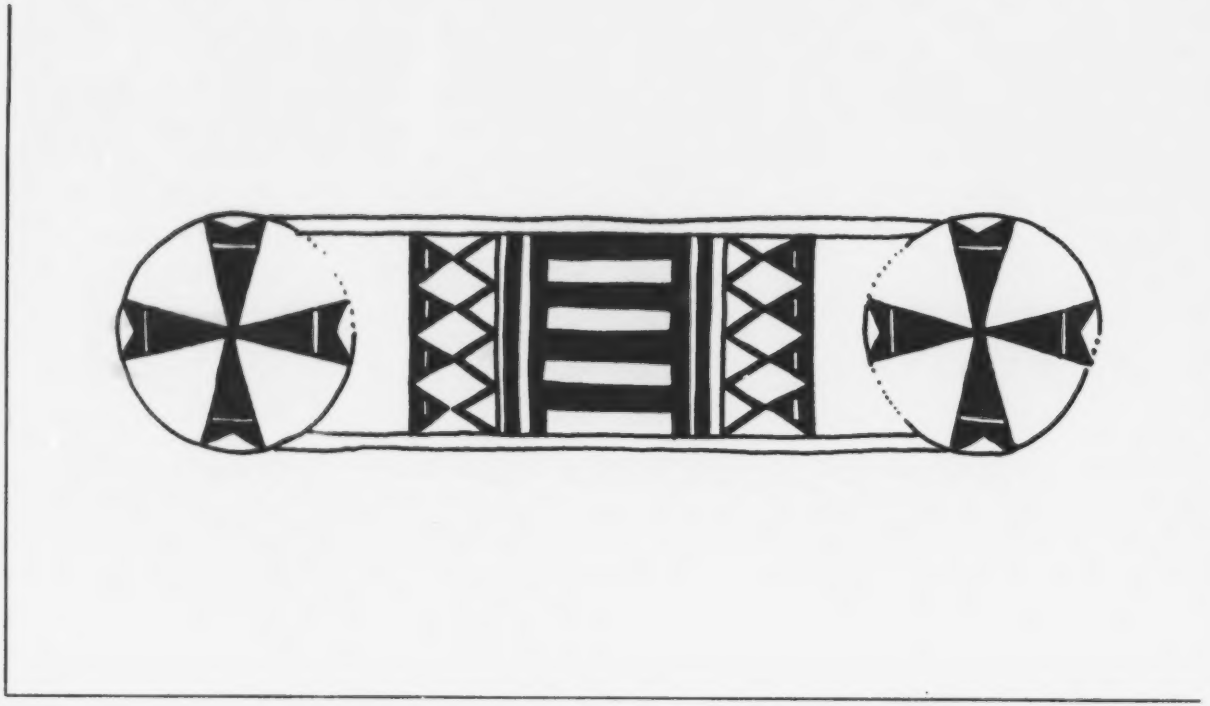
*—Essie Parrish*
*Pomo Spiritual Leader*

Regarding the "civilization" that has been thrust upon me since the days of the reservation, it has not added one whit to my sense of justice; to my reverence for the rights of life; to my love for truth, honesty and generosity; nor to my faith in Wakan Tanka — God of the Lakotas. For after all the great religions have been preached and expounded, or have been revealed by brilliant scholars, or have been written in books and embellished in fine language with fine covers, man — all man — is confronted with the Great Mystery.



So if today I had a young mind to direct, to start on the journey of life, and I was faced with the duty of choosing between the natural way of my forefathers and that of the present way of civilization, I would, for its welfare, unhesitatingly set that child's feet in the path of my forefathers. I would raise him to be an Indian!

*—Luther Standing Bear*
*Lakota Sioux*



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Training began with children who were taught to sit still and enjoy it. They were taught to use their organs of smell, to look when there was apparently nothing to see, and to listen internally when all seemingly was quiet. A child that cannot sit still is a half-developed child.

*—Luther Standing Bear*
*Lakota Sioux*

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It is the power of the true Hopi People to unify the minds and spirits of all true peace seeking peoples of the earth...

The true Hopi People preserve the sacred knowledge about the way of the earth because the true Hopi People know that the earth is a living ... growing person ... and all things on it are her children.

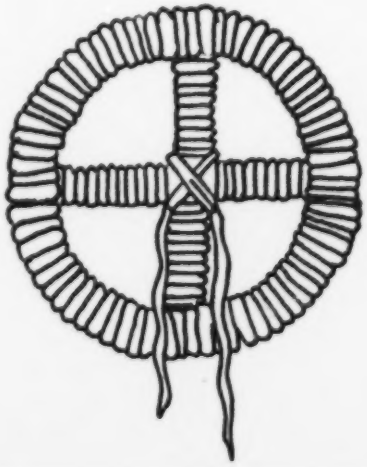
—*The Hopi Declaration of Peace*

My father went on talking to me in a low voice.
This is how our people always
talk to their children,
so low and quiet,
the child thinks
he is dreaming.
But he never forgets.

*—Maria Chona*
*Papago*

Sacred words spoken according to subject and purpose, either inside a house in the early morning, before anyone has trodden the floor or outside in the open air at a place, far from the beaten track, where there are no footprints of man. It is the usual thing that ordinary speech is not used, but the special language of the spirit ... magic words descend from father to son ...

*—Luther Standing Bear*
*Lakota Sioux*



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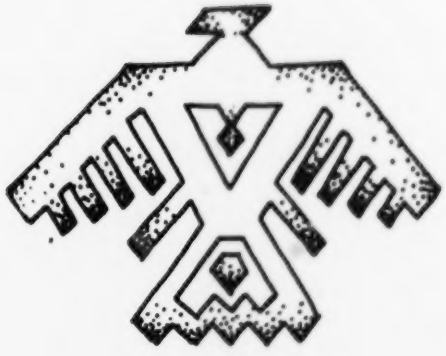
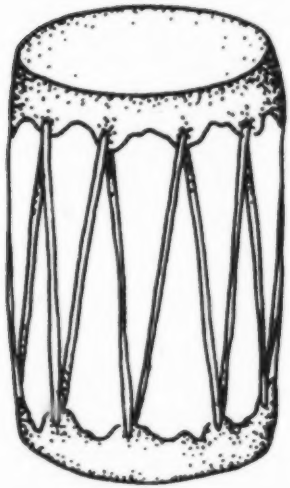
I still keep up the old system of teaching my children at the campfire. In the morning I wake them up early and start to teach them as follows: My children, as you travel along life's road never harm anyone, nor cause anyone to feel sad. On the contrary, if at anytime you can make a person happy, do so.

*—Winnebago Elder*



In our tribal custom, which was handed down to my grandfather ... each of his children were assigned to a tutor, like he had been by his grandparents, so that each child would be trained by an expert. It was not a parent that was undertaking the teaching of the young child. It was an elder. These experts were proficient in hunting and everything for survival, as well as teaching the blessing of the Great Creator.

*—Alex Saluskin*
*Yakima*



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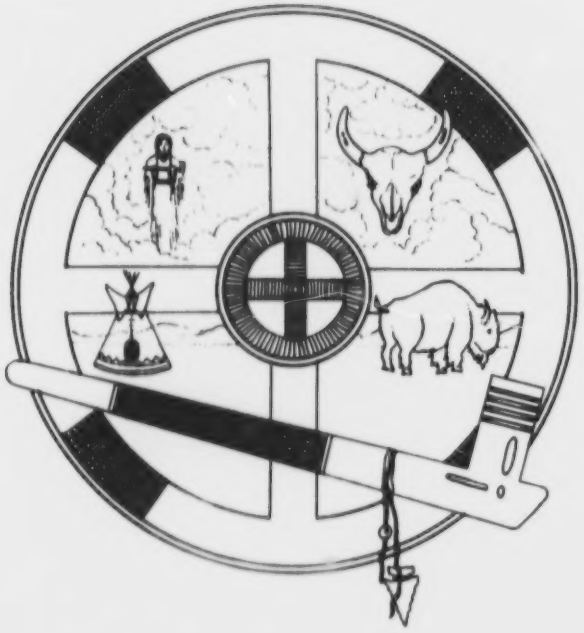
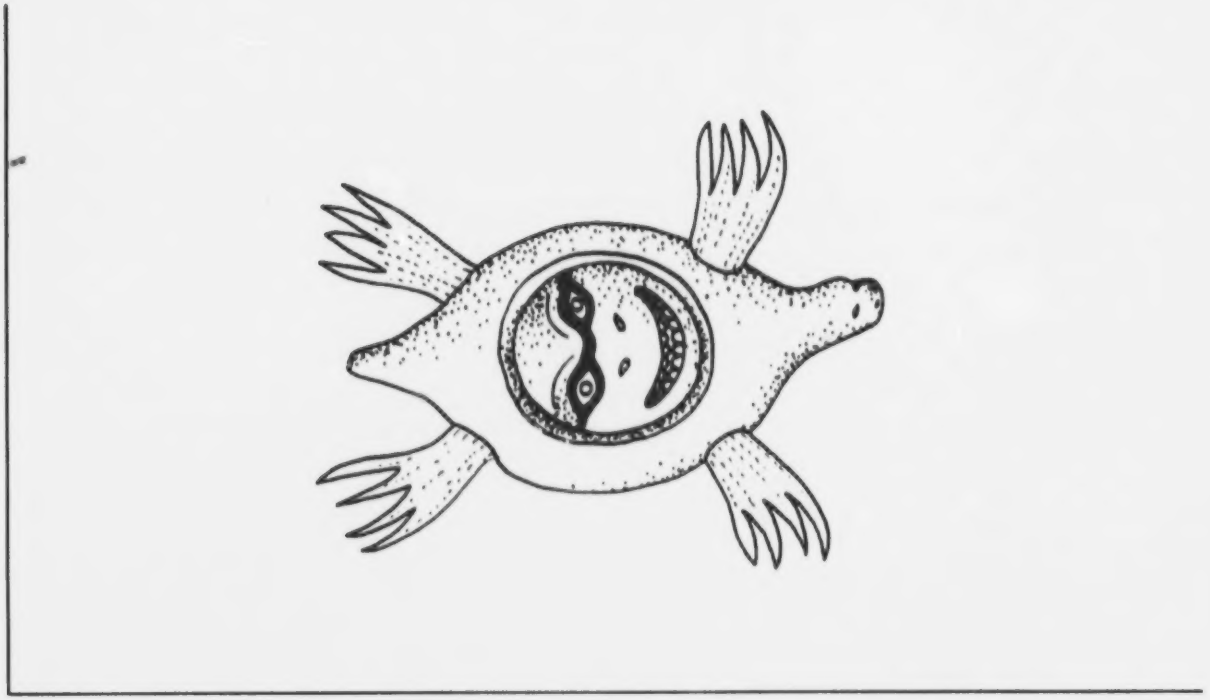
I never asked anyone, "why?" It would have meant that I was learning nothing. In Western society if you don't ask why they think you are stupid. So having been raised to not ask why but to listen, become aware, I take for granted that people have some knowledge of themselves and myself. Then when we know ourselves we can put our feelings together and share this knowledge.

*—Sage Track*
*Taos Pueblo*



Lakota children, like all others, asked questions and were answered to the best ability of our elders. We wondered, as do all young, inquisitive minds, about the stars, moon, sky, rainbow, darkness and all other phenomena of nature. I can recall lying on the earth and wondering what it was all about. The stars were a beautiful sight. Many of these questions were answered in story form by the older people.

*—Luther Standing Bear*
*Lakota Sioux*



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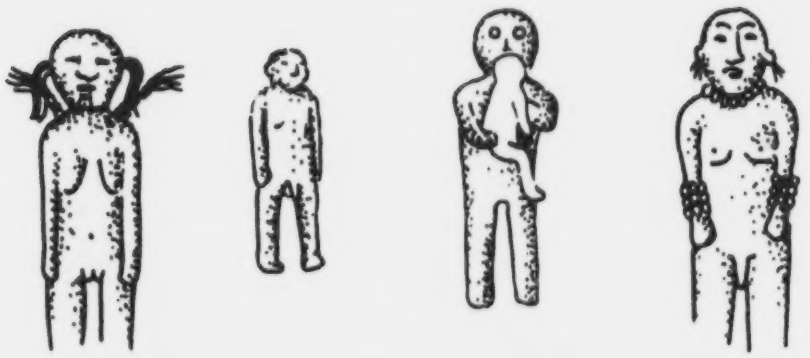
Too much thought only leads to trouble.
We Eskimos do not concern ourselves with solving
all riddles. We repeat the old stories in the way
they were told to us and with the words
we ourselves remember.

*– Orulo*
*Iglulik Eskimo*



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Boys and girls began their education with their parents and by the time they reached their teenage years, they had mastered the skills necessary to survive on the land here. From that time forward, the youth with his family and within his community devoted his attention to his intellectual and social growth.

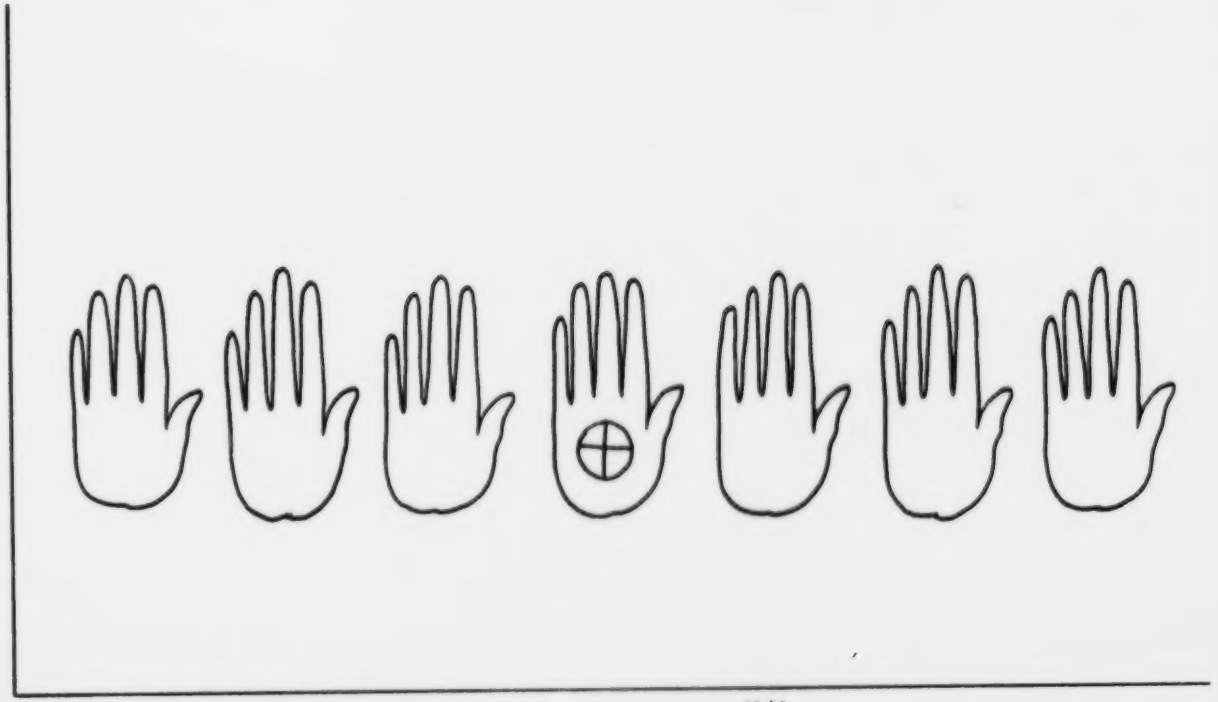
*—Mayer Hobson*
*Inuplag Eskimo*

You don't ask questions
when you are growing up.

You watch
and listen
and wait,
and the answer will come to you.

It's yours then, not like learning in school.

*–Larry Bird*
*Keres Tribe*



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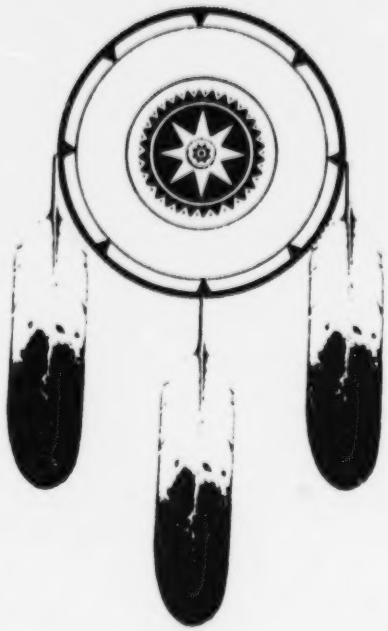
See these elders, these are those who paid attention to this counsel, which is of the grown up people. Do not forget this that I am telling you; pay heed to this speech and when you are old like these old people, you will counsel your sons and daughters in like manner and your spirit will rise northwards to the sky, like the stars ...

—*Lutseno*

Stan Padilla, Native American artist and educator, is author/illustrator of the book *Dream Feather* and illustrator of the book *Song of the Seven Herbs.*

He is very involved in the education of Native American young people. He is also active in the civil rights/human rights movement globally. He maintains an arts studio in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in Northeastern California.



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